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Office of University
Communications

April 5, 2016

Taylor Schwartz ('16) Prepared to Further Education in Cognitive Neuroscience

As a Division I swimmer at Gardner-Webb, Taylor Schwartz ('16) of Westerville, Ohio, is accustomed to the nerves that accompany her athletic performances. Her interest in the subject intensified when she was named an undergraduate research scholar. Using her background as a psychology major, she and her mentor, Dr. Brooke Thompson, structured a cognitive neurology experiment in which Schwartz could measure performance, social, and pain anxiety among individuals set to perform an athletic task.

“I was able to use a biofeedback machine that measures and monitors waves in your brain,” Schwartz explained. “We were looking at how different anxieties might cause differing brain waves depending on the fear the participants associated with the pain that might be involved.”

For Schwartz, the opportunity to embark on such an extensive research project as an undergraduate bodes well for her future plans. “I’m interested in pursuing more higher education after this—whether that be a master’s degree or a doctorate,” she expressed. “One of the qualifications is that you have had some undergrad research experience. It’s not for the weak of heart. You need to be ready and willing to basically make it your job for five weeks. Working on the project strengthened my ability to pursue and conduct my own research. It was an incredibly rewarding experience.”

She was ready to tackle the research project because of the skills she developed in her other courses. “Seminar classes in psychology and philosophy have challenged me to think outside of the world of thought I grew up in and encouraged me to pursue my own manner of thinking,” she related. “In history and organic chemistry classes, I was pushed to do things I didn’t think I was capable of academically, and this gave me the self-confidence to pursue my passions.”

Two professors who have influenced her the most are Thompson and Dr. Ben Coates, assistant professor of Spanish. “Dr. Thompson and her mentorship during my summer research experience will leave a lasting impact on my academic career, and I hope to one day pour into students in the same way that she has invested in me,” she reflected. “I had the privilege of taking several of Dr. Coates’ Spanish classes, as well as going with him on a

mission trip to Nicaragua. He has graciously written a letter of recommendation for my graduate school applications. Dr. Coates invests in his students and strives to be a guide in their academic endeavors. He is interested in his students outside of the classroom but demands a strong work ethic and sets the academic bar high in his classes. He properly balances his career with family life and ministry and he is a role model for many students at Gardner-Webb.”

She believes her Spanish minor will give her opportunities to be more connected in a global society. “We are living in a world where being bilingual is an essential part of the education of a person,” she affirmed. “The Spanish population in the United States continues to grow, and I think learning about another culture through language eliminates racial barriers and stereotypes. I have also really enjoyed studying Spanish since high school. It is a completely different subject from everything else, and it is amazing to be able to communicate in a foreign language. I was able to use it during my mission trip to Nicaragua and with a server I encountered on a family vacation. Those opportunities where you can connect with someone else through another language are incredible.”

Although she is keeping her options open, Schwartz is focusing her next steps in the direction of psychology, language, and/or cognitive neuroscience. Her goal is to complete a doctorate in clinical rehabilitation therapy for patients with traumatic brain injuries, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), or Alzheimer’s.

Her confidence about the future is a result of participating in the supportive Gardner-Webb community and its Christian foundation. “You get out of your Gardner-Webb experience what you put into it,” she asserted. “If you want to invest and make relationships with great people, you can. If you want to prepare yourself for graduate studies and network with businesses, you can. But you have to buy in. You have to go to events, you have to attend seminars, and you need to ask questions.”

She continued, “I’ve had so many people ask me about what I love about attending Gardner-Webb. I decided on Gardner-Webb, because it was a place I could see myself and a community that I wanted to be a part of. That has been the most rewarding thing about going to school here. This community extends from the student body to professors to pastors to parents. It’s really been a large web of support for me.”